

**MAKING MEANINGFUL CHOICES IN IBSEN'S *AN ENEMY OF THE
PEOPLE* DRAMA (1882): AN EXISTENTIALIST CRITICISM**



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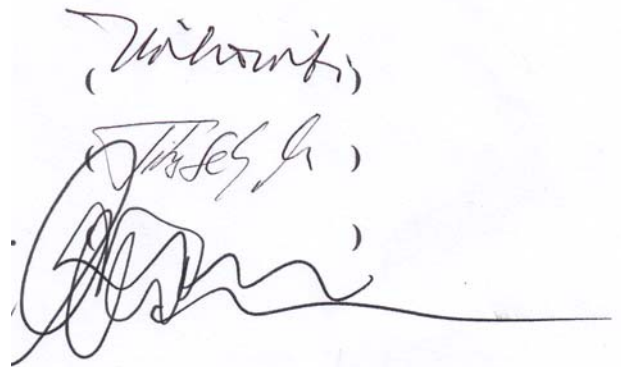
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ABSTRACT

The major issue of this study is how people make meaningful choices in searching for meaning of life reflected in Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. The objective of this study is to analyze the drama based on the existentialist criticism. The technique used in analyzing the data is descriptive analysis. It concerns with the existentialist criticism. Through the analysis the researcher draws conclusion that based on the existentialist analysis, there is an existential value in the drama. Henrik Ibsen illustrates an existential phenomenon in which an individual is making attempts to make this life meaningful. Although he has to contradict the majority, he is willing to take the risks and also responsible for his choices.

Keywords: Meaningful Choices, *an Enemy of the People*, Existentialist Criticism.

I. INTRODUCTION

An Enemy of the People is a realistic drama in five acts by Henrik Ibsen that was published at 1882. The story is about social problems. Ibsen issued *an Enemy of the People* addressed to the hypocrisy, falsehood, and corrupt nature of the political system. Drama used in this research is an electronic classic series that was translated by Farquharson Sharp published by Pennsylvania State University on 2010. Henrik Ibsen is a Norwegian famous modern playwright who was born in Skien, Norway on 20 March 1828. He passed away on 23 May 1906. Ibsen was also best known as a Norwegian "Father of Modern Drama". He was also the author of poetic dramas and folklore such as *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), etc. He also has international reputation for realistic drama

that portrays social issues. His career can be divided into poetic dramas that dealt with historical themes, folklore, and romantic pageantry. All of his works was a symbolist, idealist, and realist literature.

This drama tells about a coastal town in south Norway that becomes a major health resort because of the new municipal bath. For almost two years the town has developed. The economy and business grew and unemployment reduce. The major character Dr. Stockmann is an important man in the town as the medical officer of the municipal bath. The younger brother who has contributed to the development of the Municipal Bath got news that there is contamination of the water in the bath. As a prolific he decides to write about the contamination and publish it in "People Messenger" then as a medical officer he would take a research to the water in the bath. On the other hand, Peter disagrees with that. They have conflict about this idea and getting high words.

Then, a town meeting is held in Captain Horster's house a seafarer to let the townspeople know the fact about the bath based on Dr. Stockmann idea. They deliver their idea about the incident in the bath the medical officer fight against his elder brother and his supporter that supported his unethical position. Finally, he loses to convince the townspeople about his idea then they state him as An Enemy of the People. He gets fired as a medical officer in the bath committee and also persons who close with him namely his daughter Petra, and also Ejlif and Morten that are regarded as an enemy of the people at school. Then, the family decides to hold out his life in the town without involving the townspeople. He would educate his children with his own way and also Petra and his wife would support the family.

Some aspects that make this play interesting are firstly the drama is one of big drama by Ibsen that has been published that criticizes the hypocrisy and falsehood in the society. Some of Ibsen's plays have critic to the social issues in that time. The previous play that Ibsen published is *A Doll's House* drama (1879) that has critical to the marriage norms in the 18th century. It is the representation of striving women right that reflects in the Victorian value. While, *An Enemy of the People* is a portray of

realism value that represented in the situation of the society in that period. The major character Dr. Stockmann in the play who wants to reveal the truth about the bath is sincerity and innocent but he is also fiery, stubborn, and honest, but he must fight against the minor character the mayor of the town and the townspeople who support him.

The next aspect is the conflict of the two brothers that makes the story exciting to be followed. It seems that the conflict is continual, but then the elder brother defeated his younger brother in convincing the townspeople. The climax is Dr. Stockmann is regarded as 'an enemy of the people' and also his family. The last aspect is the message of the story in the play. It is shown by the decision of the medical officer to make existentialist or meaningful choices in his life although he must be alienated from the society. The making meaningful choices reflected in the major character Dr. Stockmann in the drama is the main reason of choosing this study.

Knowing that the problem is the most important part of research, the writer proposes the problem "how is making meaningful choices reflected in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* drama (1882)?" Based on the problem statement above the objectives of the study are to analyze Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* drama (1882) based on an existentialist criticism. There are two previous studies that used by the writer on this object of study. The first previous study is an essay by Martin J. Walker (2008) Science and Democracy entitled *Uncomfortable Science and Enemies of the People*. The next previous study is conducted by Mordecai Roshwald (2004) A new critical edition of novel, level seven, The University of Wisconsin Press entitled *The Alienated Moralist in An Enemy of the People*. Roshwald concludes that the doctor is a defiant and militant moralist.

Existence is "a duty for humans. If real existence is a duty, so existence must be inspired as an ethic and religious thing. Existence enables an individual to choose and to make decision, and also to act upon his or her own responsibility" (Hassan, 1993: 30-31). Then, according to Berdyaev as quoted by Hassan (1993: 80), the

essential and fundamental problem of man is “the problem of man-of his knowledge, his freedom, his creativeness. Man is the key to the mystery of knowledge.”

Existentialism is “concerning with how to experience life. Life is not just enough to think something. Life is not just a little thing as we think, but rather as we experience it. More and more deep our experience for life is the more meaningful of the life,” (Hassan, 1993: 24). Human being is the part of existentialism. Existentialism is the way of how human decides his choices to search for meaning of life. According to Nietzsche, humans must decide and also must be creative of his choices. The clear definition about that as quoted by Hassan (1993: 53) is as follows:

The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. Human must uninterruptedly to be creative. Creation-that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change. Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creator. Human must be creative persistently and must perpetually pass over himself.

Human being as an existence will always face choices. Humans will be responsible to what decisions that they have made. Becoming an existentialist is closely related to how humans experience life based on his decision of making a meaningful life. Thus, existentialism is the way thinking of humans based on his freedom and creativeness to experience life in order to search for meaning of life by making meaningful choices.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

They are primary data source and secondary data source. The primary data source is taken from *An Enemy of the People* drama (1882) by Henrik Ibsen an Electronic Classics Series that translated by Farquharson Sharp published by Pennsylvania State University 2010. While, the secondary data sources are books, author's bibliography, essays, information, and other relevant information that support the analysis.

The technique of data collection is library research, the steps are as follows: Reading the drama script repeatedly, searching for detail information of the drama, taking notes of important parts in both primary and secondary data, determining the character that will be analyzed, classifying and determining the relevant data, and collecting some supporting data from other references that are related to the topic. Then, the technique used in analyzing the data is descriptive analysis. It concerns with the existentialist criticism.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. FINDINGS

Here Sartre's Existentialism Theory elaboration will be divided into seven parts. They are Being, Existence Precedes Essence, Consciousness (Cogito), Freedom to Choose, Anxiety, Transcendence of Ego, and Nothingness. The explanations of each part are as follows:

1. Being

Sartre's existentialism theory of being is divided into two, namely; being-in-itself (etre-en-soi) and being-for-itself (etre-pour-soi). Being-in-itself is "Non-conscious Being. It is the Being of the phenomenon and overflows the knowledge which we have of it. It is a plenitude, and strictly speaking we can say of it only that it is" (Sartre, 1958: 629). Being-for-itself (etre-pour-soi) is "The nihilation of Being-in-itself; consciousness conceived as a lack of being, a desire for Being, a relation to being. By bringing nothingness into the world the For-itself can stand out from being and judge other beings by knowing what it is not. Each For-itself is the nihilation of a particular being" (Sartre, 1958: 629).

In *an Enemy of the People* drama the being-in-itself is shown by the existence of thing such as: town, municipal baths and the local newspaper "People's Messenger". The baths and the newspaper are objects in the drama. It is also called as phenomenon such Sartre defines being-in-itself is being of the phenomenon. The being-for-itself is represented through the character Dr.

Stockmann. The meaningful choices appear from the contribution of the doctor for the newspaper articles that finally he wants to publish articles about the pollution of the baths. It has objective for humanity but it tends to harm the existence of the town.

“Dr. Stockmann (*taking his hat and stick*). It shall be made public all the same. I will read it out at a mass meeting of the townspeople. All my fellow-citizens shall hear the voice of truth!
(Enemy People, Act III)

2. Existence Precedes Essence

Existentialists differentiate existence and essence. From existentialists' view existence comes first before essence. Then, after there is an existence there will be an essence. If humans have realized of their existence, there will be an essence of their existence. According to Sartre (1958: 630), existence is “Concrete, individual being here and now. Existence always has a subjective quality when applied to human reality.” While, essence is “what has been. Sartre calls it man's past. Since there is no pre-established pattern for human nature, each man makes his essence as he lives” (Sartre, 1958: 630). According to Sartre (2002: 44), Man first of all exist is “to encounter himself, surge up in the world- and define himself afterwards.”

There are some situations that bring the doctor to make meaningful choices related to the municipal baths. The first situation there is a fact that is hidden by the committee of baths and community of the town. The second situation is when the chairman of the baths committee knew about the medical officer plan, he tries to block the doctor action. The third situation is when the doctor failed to publish his article, he said that he will make copies of his articles and give it to every people in the town. The fourth situation is after Dr. Stockmann is regarded as an enemy of the people. The result of the public meeting is the doctor must be alienated by the townspeople because he endangers the town existence and also the townspeople. His existence has become essence

after he passes those situations. His meaningful choices are not popular choices. On the process of his becoming the doctor has made meaningful choices in searching for meaning of his life.

3. Consciousness (Cogito)

Consciousness is “a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself” (Sartre, 1958: 629). Cogito is “concerning the existence of others. While we cannot abstractly prove the Other's existence, this cogito will disclose to me his ‘concrete, indubitable presence,’ just as my own ‘contingent but necessary existence’ has been revealed to me” (Sartre, 1958: 629).

The consciousness of Stockmann is shown in the first situation when he decides to write an article about the baths pollution. The consciousness of the doctor is also shown in the second situation when he wants to publish his own article in the People's Messenger. But, he is unconscious that his articles will give huge effect for the town and also townspeople reaction. Then, in the third situation the doctor actions continued when he hold a public meeting with the townspeople related to the baths pollution. The doctor thinking and action represent the humanity mission that the pollution will harm the visitors. But, he is unaware that it tends to harm the town. Aspects of consciousness in the drama shown by Dr. Stockmann is because of he is conscious about humanity and the effect of the baths for humanity.

4. Freedom to Choose

According to Sartre human reality is “free, basically and completely free” (Hassan, 1993: 144). According to Sartre as quoted by Hassan (1993: 134), Man is “nothing else but what he makes of himself.” It means that man is nothing, if man does not make himself to be meaningful in life. This is the freedom of the man itself as an individual to bring him to be meaningful or meaningless in his life. Man is the decision maker who is responsible of the consequences he made.

In the first situation, freedom to choose of the doctor is shown when he decides to write an article for local newspaper. The next freedom to choose of the doctor comes when he decides to publish his article about the baths pollution. In the third situation, he chooses the next action when he failed publish his articles through the editorial. Then, his freedom to choose comes again when he wants to rent a hall to hold a public meeting to show the townspeople about the baths pollution. In the fourth situation, the freedom to choose of the doctor is shown when he decides to make a school, while he will wait the townspeople change and realize of his actions.

“Dr. Stockmann (snapping his fingers and getting up from the table). I have it! I have it, by Jove! You shall never set foot in the school again!” (EnemyPeople, Act V)

5. Anxiety

Anxiety is “from lack of knowing the real and effective incentives which in the darkness of the unconscious determine my action” (Sartre, 1958: 33). There is no human being that can hide from anxiety. Peoples cannot run from his anxiety or disturb of thinking. They apparently act without anxious and doubt, but they are followed by anxiety. They are aware and responsible for their existence. When peoples claim that they are not anxious, actually they are hiding their anxiety (Sartre, 2002: 49).

In the first situation, the character of Dr. Stockmann does not show his anxiety when he choose to write articles about the baths pollution. In the second situation, the anxiety of the doctor is shown when he wants to print the articles in the editorial. His elder brother tries to prevent his effort to print his articles. He is anxious whether he will print in the editorial or not. In the third situation, the anxiety of Dr. Stockmann is shown when he is failed in publishing his articles. Then, his anxiety continued when he said that he will make a public meeting for the townspeople. He is anxious whether he can make it or not. In the fourth

situation, the anxiety of Dr. Stockmann is shown after he and his family are regarded as enemy of the people. He is anxious about his family. Those anxieties are the result of human existence to decide what they have to choose or not. It is a process of how humans have to make decision for their choices.

6. Transcendence of Ego

Transcendence is “often refers simply to the process whereby the For-itself goes beyond the given in a further project of itself. Sometimes the For-itself is itself called a transcendence. The word ‘transcendence’ is sometimes purely a substantive, sometimes refers to a process” (Sartre, 1958: 634).

Dr. Stockmann has reached out his ego. The doctor has been done something to defend his conviction to reveal the truth about the baths pollution through anything that he can do. Then, the next is he has done something meaningful for humanity that his efforts is because of he cares about the visitors that will become the victim of the baths pollution. The next is he really loves his native town, so he does not want to let his town develops upon a lie of the community. Stockmann’s transcendence of ego is influenced by other people, society, and humanity.

7. Nothingness

Nothingness is “not itself have Being, yet it is supported by Being. It comes into the world by the For-itself and is the recoil from fullness of self-contained Being which allows consciousness to exist as such” (Sartre, 1958: 632). While according to Hassan (1993: 143), nothingness is “something beyond of the existence. If we die, then death is not for ourselves, but also for those we left behind. So, the others are who give meaning for each death, not ourselves.” Nothingness is a result of death. Death is “something that absurd. That is because of the fact that death cannot be waited when it come, although it definitely expected to it arrival” (Hassan, 1993: 143).

In *An Enemy of the People* drama, nothingness is shown from the existence of Morten and Ejlif. The two children have no process of becoming in

the drama. They are just natural children who are ignorant and also have not been understood himself yet. Children are not mature enough to define himself, so they have not been understand yet for the process of their becoming.

“**Morten.** Well, I could become a pagan, couldn't I?

Ejlif. I should like so much to stay a little longer—“
(*Enemy People*, Act I)

B. DISCUSSION

Through *An Enemy of the People* drama Ibsen shows the major character that gives meaningful contribution in his life in the process of his becoming. The major character has chosen meaningful choices by becoming medical officer and prolific contributor all at once. Becoming a person like Dr. Stockmann is like becoming an unusual man with unpopular choices of life. Ibsen shows the existence of life of humans through the doctor choices and actions. The existence of human comes first before the essence. Human existence is also influenced by consciousness. After human conscious from his existence then he will decide his goal of life.

In deciding his choices and actions, as a man in existence he also has freedom to choose. So, he is free for choices that he has chosen and he also will be responsible for it. His freedom to choose as an existence shows that human is free to choose. Ibsen also shows the freedom to choose of the major character in his decision to fight against his elder brother. His freedom to choose of doing that is also influenced by his anxiety. His anxiety appears when he has to choose to make copies of his article or to make a mass meeting. Then, his anxiety brings him to make a public meeting for townspeople to show the people about condition of the baths pollution. In deciding his choices and actions human will always be faced by condition that is called anxiety.

Through *An Enemy of the People* Ibsen shows the existence of human is also influenced by ego. Human is sometimes out of his ego. He can bring his ego to make him to do something useful for someone else or society. This is called the

transcendence of ego. Dr. Stockmann has reached higher level of ego when he decides to help his community to not live upon a lie, because he has humanity mission in his action to reveal the truth about the baths pollution. Ibsen also shows that human being is in nothingness when he does not realize of his existence. It also can be said that human who is died is in nothingness. Then, nothingness in the drama is shown by the existence of children who is not in full consciousness for their existence. Children have not been understood yet for what their existence, so they have not been defined himself yet.

Finally, through *An Enemy of the People* drama Ibsen builds meaningful story which will inspire the readers and audience through the existence of Dr. Stockmann. His existence is to make meaningful choices for his life. By making meaningful choices he has decided his goal of life. Although he must be an enemy of the people and also alienated by his community, he has made meaningful choices of life. Meaningful choices are not always popular choices. The aspect of existentialism is reflected in the drama.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

After analyzing *An Enemy of the People* drama by using existentialist criticism, the writer draws the following conclusion. It is clear that through the drama, Ibsen wanted to deliver moral message that the meaningful choices are not always popular choice. Although Dr. Stockmann might suffer materially, he did not suffer morally. Based on existentialist analysis, it is obvious that in this play Henrik Ibsen illustrates an existential phenomenon in which an individual is making attempts to make this life meaningful. Although he has to contradict the majority, he is willing to take the risks. He is also responsible for the choices he has made.

The implication of this research for English Teaching is to show the students that there are many choices that will bring them to be meaningful or meaningless in life. Students will always be faced by choices. Sometimes, choices that they choose will make them become usual or unusual in the society. Somehow, they have to make

meaningful choices, although they must contradict people and become unusual in the community. Students will be responsible for choices they have made.

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